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Preventing Permits for Marcellus Shale

West Virginia lawmakers are calling for a time out on Marcellus Shale drilling after the legislature failed to pass a bill regulating the industry.

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 [Debate Over Marcellus Shale](#)



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CHARLESTON, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- West Virginia lawmakers are calling for a time out on Marcellus Shale drilling after the legislature failed to pass a bill regulating the industry.

Some House delegates are coming together to voice their concerns signing a letter and hoping to put a stop to permits.

The Department of Environmental Protection has issued more than 700 permits to allow drilling for the gas.

Lawmakers explained in a press conference Friday afternoon how their fears are growing from the impacts associated with the drilling on the environment and the communities, especially if some laws aren't put in place soon.

Tapping into this new industry has presented challenges and brought uncertainty and concern.

"There's just no way the DEP has the capacity to do more than they're doing right now," Democratic Delegate Barbara Fleischauer said. "I mean this is really scary in communities where there could be a natural gas explosion."

Fleischauer added, "If the community is involved from the get-go, then everybody knows what they're supposed to do if something unfortunate happens."

Lawmakers say West Virginia's drilling laws haven't been updated in more than 30 years

and especially with the new technologies like horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, which left some uneasy.

"We don't have any accountability with such minimal oversight," Democratic Delegate Mike Manypenny said. "How are we going to protect the citizen's health and well being in this state when it comes to air quality, water quality?"

About 20 House delegates signed a request calling for the DEP secretary to use his emergency powers to stop issuing permits until regulations are in place.

Delegates say they want to protect property owners, the environment and ensure enforcement -- especially with the effects of drilling including surface disturbance, water use and waste disposal.

The DEP says 15 inspectors oversee the industry and see no need for a moratorium on permits.

In a statement WV DEP officials said, "In 2010, the Office of Oil and Gas issued approximately 400 drilling permits that target the Marcellus Shale formation. Around 300 of those were horizontal wells. In that same year, only around 60 wells were reported to the agency as having been completed.

While the agency sought legislation to increase the number of inspectors because the scope of these projects, at this point we don't believe there is a need for a moratorium on issuing new permits."

Lawmakers still worry without regulation the damage could be irreversible, as one delegate experienced firsthand.

"The location they picked they destroyed the best part of my property," Republican Delegate Harold Sigler said "It dropped the value terribly, flooded the hay fields and it hurts me, it makes me mad because if I were a farmer, making a living off of this, it would have broke me."

Acting Governor Earl Ray Tomblin said he would not call a special session to address Marcellus Shale.

Some of the delegates say they were upset the bill died during the session and are calling for leadership so legislation can get passed sooner rather than later.

The letter asking for a moratorium on the permits was sent to the DEP Friday afternoon with dozens of signatures.

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